



United States Department of State

Under Secretariat for Civilian Security,
Democracy, and Human Rights

Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

Colleagues and friends:

Two weeks ago in Kenya, our car pulled off the road in the Rift Valley's Burnt Forest. This was one of the worst-hit areas during 2007 post-electoral violence that left 1,300 people dead and more than 600,000 homeless across the country. Destroyed homes still mark the landscape. Unemployed young people gathered around, eager to talk about the March 4 election and their hope that it will be fair, free, and peaceful.



Rick Barton speaking with Kenyan media

Unfortunately, not all Kenyans share that goal. Recently, a member of Parliament was arrested and charged with incitement to violence for making ethnically charged statements. Fortunately, the arrest generated substantial media coverage, sending a message that hate speech will not be tolerated. The incident made an impression on everyone we spoke with in Burnt Forest.

The 200 Kenyans we met during six days traveling in the country recognize that the success of the current constitutional reforms will depend on a peaceful election season. Kenya will celebrate 50 years of independence in

2013, and the coming nine months will help determine its future.

The Kenya initiative is one of our [four top priorities](#). In coordination with the U.S. Embassy, led by Chargé d'Affaires Robert Godec, CSO staff and interagency partners are focusing their efforts beyond the capital. They are working with a range of Kenyans, including tribal elders, government officials, police, women, youth, and the business community. Together, we can help increase international attention on areas prone to conflict and amplify networks of Kenyans who want electoral security and greater responsiveness from their government and political leaders.

Of course, it is the Kenyans who will determine how this election season turns out. At a meeting of non-governmental organizations that specialize in health, horticulture, and other needs, we were encouraged by pledges to mobilize the citizens they work with to take part in peace-building to create a stable environment leading up to and beyond the elections. These citizens vastly outnumber those who will try to use violence to disrupt the political process, and we stand ready to help them extend their peaceful influence.

Religion and conflict

Chastened by a mixed reaction to prior election violence, Kenya's religious leaders are preparing to play a peace-building role. In several places they are the primary organizers of local groups. Their dedication to the cause is a reminder of the major role that religion often plays not only in inflaming conflict but also in securing peace. CSO Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jerry White moderated a panel we helped organize to promote discussion on this topic during the UN General Assembly's first week. The event attracted more than 130 representatives from foreign ministries, faith-based groups, universities, research forums, and the U.S. Government eager to explore ways to mobilize faith communities to inhibit religious violence.

There were keynote addresses by Under Secretary of State Maria Otero and Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. "Governments and faith-based civil society organizations should strengthen their collaboration to overcome ignorance, radicalism and the misuse of religion," Ihsanoğlu said. Other prominent participants included Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo of Kenya, permanent representative to the UN, and Dr. Aref Ali Nayed, founder and director of Kalam Research & Media in Libya.

Religion was also top of mind for one of those who responded to our first newsletter. Mike Menning, former chief of mission in Damascus for the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, stressed the importance of engaging what he called religious moderates. "They exist," Mike wrote, "but don't have the courage to speak." Such "silenced majorities" are found in many countries, and one of CSO's primary objectives is to help them find their voices. Mike would like to see religious moderates in the United States invite moderates from nations with religion-based conflicts to visit this country and discuss trends and tolerance.

We thank all of you who took the time to share your thoughts and hope to hear from others. Please write us at CSOpublic@state.gov and forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation.

Best,

Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

P.S. Kenya is not the only place where outreach to youth is an important part of our strategy. In the northern tier of Central America murder rates have soared, reflecting the growth of gangs and drug trafficking. At the urging of the government of Belize, we provided extensive mediation training, and it is helping keep conflict from escalating to violence. For more, please go to our [Facebook page](#).

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